

# Inside London's five-star rehab clinic

Yoga, gourmet food and designer luxury ... how the plush new therapy centre treats alcoholism, eating disorders, and drug addiction

## CAROLINE PHILLIPS

HERE'S nothing outside the elegant stucco Chelsea townhouse to indicate the extraordinary things that go on inside. Nothing to show why the rich, famous and just plain troubled now store this discreet address in their BlackBerries. A peer of the realm and a young woman stand on the pavement chatting. "It's great that you're also dealing with your sex compulsion," she says. He smiles.

"Is that an acupuncture stud in your ear?" he answers.

"No," she responds. "A magnet. I press it to release endorphins and serotonin."

These are patients at The Recovery Centre, a private clinic that offers just five clients at any time for £1,200 a day a bespoke treatment for addictions within the walls of a smart residential London house. There is a choice of more than 80 freelance counsellors plus some off-beat "therapies" — from playing polo, go-karting and watching butterflies to shopping in Bond Street with a personal shopper, about which more later.

Despite its bizarre approach and high fees, such is the demand that within little more than six months of opening in November last year, the owners have rejected a bid to be bought out and are now planning further centres in Notting Hill, Primrose Hill and the City.

The centre is the brainchild of Charisse Cooke, 28, a south African psychologist, and Robert Batt, 40, a former drug addict and aristocrat who, aged six, inherited his family's Norfolk estate and 24 cottages. He swapped snorting "shed-loads" of cocaine, spending £50,000 on shopping in one day and driving one of his Ferraris drunkenly through a field for eight years of personal recovery, a psychology masters degree and personally financing The Recovery Centre.

Cooke and Batt's brand of therapy attracts aristocrats, rock stars and millionaires. It has become the treatment centre of choice for one supermodel. "An estimated one in 10 of the population suffers from addiction," says Dr Robert Lefever, a world authority on the subject and the man for whom Batt and Cooke worked for five years at the Promis clinic.

I'm visiting the centre to experience two days of treatment — to top up the regular therapy I've been doing for the past 19 years after successfully recovering from an eating disorder, amphetamine addiction and alcoholism in my early twenties.

I came from a classic dysfunctional family — my mother walked out when I was 12 and before that I'd had to deal with her mental illness. When I was 21 and at Bristol University, I saw a con-

sultant psychiatrist in Harley Street. I was so intimidated at having to expose myself psychologically that I would take amphetamines before visits. The psychiatrist helped me but also colluded in my addictive behaviour: "You're not an addict," said the good doctor. "You don't take pills every day."

When I went to work in Fleet Street, I started drinking and bingeing. I appeared to have it all: a good job, nice flat, fast car, friends. But inside I was desolate, lonely and often suicidal. It was after I spent a weekend hidden in my flat alone, crying inconsolably that a friend with whom I'd lived told me about Promis.

She talked openly about her eating disorder — which had been such a shameful and secretive disease for me.

**'Robert Batt swapped snorting shed-loads of cocaine and spending £50,000 on shopping in one day for working as a therapist'**

She was full of hope and happiness. So I checked into Promis for addiction counselling. After that, I spent five years in psychoanalysis and graduated to a psychoanalytical psychotherapy group. Treatment at Promis saved my life — but it was tough love. So I'm curious to see how different the luxury atmosphere of The Recovery Centre will be.

Cooke greets me wreathed in smiles. "We were just talking about Treatment Chic," she laughs, sporting a Hermès belt. I nip into the bathroom: it's marble with fluffy white towels, Jo Malone soap and luxurious Diptique candles burning. But this is no urban retreat-style spa. If addicts are recovering here, there will also be tears and hurt aplenty.

It's 9am and time for my appointment with Cooke, who has designed my personal programme. Questions cover everything from whether I've ever prostituted myself to whether I suffer from sexual anorexia, exercise obsession or have a criminal history. Having said no to the first two and admitted to shoplifting, aged 19, and a nascent exercise obsession, we move on. I leave the session feeling exposed and vulnerable. In between sessions, staff walk in and



Here to help: on hand at The Recovery Centre in Chelsea — for those able to pay £1,200 a day — are (from

left) treatment manager Charisse Cooke, chef Nick Timothy and life management therapist Wendy Ridley. Cooke is seen here with a patient. Batt says he's watching my eyes darting around, "filtering" what I'm going to say. He remarks upon my breathing becoming more shallow. "I feel tearful," he adds, wanting me to talk, "as if my gut is being wrenched and contorted." I squirm. I'm not used to therapists sharing their emotions.

Immediately after group therapy, Cooke bounces in giggling. "Hello lovely ladies. Let's change the atmosphere in here. Let's play a game." We each pull a piece of paper out of a glass and follow its directions. "Your secret wish ..." is one. "Reveal your most embarrassing moment ..." is another. My answer? Running down a Kensington street as a dare, stooped and wearing only a moped helmet. It's the kind of party game I'd play when I was drunk. Puerile perhaps. But it offers welcome

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**'In group therapy Batt speaks like a Coldstream Guard, the regiment founded by his family'**



treatment manager Charisse Cooke, chef Nick Timothy and life management therapist Wendy Ridley

ritation". With this in mind, he recently directed one patient to take creative writing lessons with novelist Raffaella Barker; escorted another to the Syon Park butterfly house ("It helped him get in touch with his inner child"); refused to treat one unless she took tap-dancing lessons; and sent several out shopping with Sally Bard-alex erstwhile personal stylist to Princess Diana and Madonna.

Some critics will find these bizarre therapies silly. Others, like myself, may consider the hugging, hand-holding and the overlap between therapists with patients to be lacking in boundaries.

I am slightly apprehensive on my second day. What is in store for me? A former theatre director turned drama therapist ("I believe in anonymity," he says) works with four of us. "When you were young, who was the dominant character in your household and what were their Ten Commandments (or rules)?" We

write our lists, my mother's "Commandments" suddenly spilling out of me. Then we enact a dinner scene, each member of the group becoming one of my family members, to debate the "rules".

**N**EXT in art therapy with Maddi Strong we use plastic toys to enact stories that become very self-revealing. The Recovery Centre believes in creative "play". "Psychoanalysis and long-term therapies have their place in treating addictions," says Charisse. "However, addicts initially respond more readily to more humanistic and supportive therapies."

After two days, I feel wrung out but also empowered. In each of the sessions I have learned something useful about myself, something to fine-tune my recovery and I have also had some fun. My own experience of early recovery was that it

was very painful facing my demons without the "anaesthetic". It's too early to tell whether Batt's patients will achieve long-term recovery. But they seem to be getting well.

You could argue the centre's approach is elitist, recovery only for the wealthy. Fortunately most people get well — for no more than minimal voluntary donations — through fellowships like Alcoholics Anonymous in draughty church halls. But to focus on the centre's "swish" factor is to miss the point. "If you're at rock bottom, lobster and cream carpets won't heal you," comments NHS and private psychotherapist Lili Reinisch. "It's the understanding of loss and addiction and the connection with patients that their emotional think-tank provides. That's how they're making a difference."

• www.therecoverycentre.com.



Celebrity choice: the Priory's flagship centre in Roehampton

## WHERE THE STARS GO TO CLEAN UP

### Capio Nightingale

This Marylebone residential clinic provides treatment for drug and alcohol problems, phobias and stress. It has also introduced services for gambling addicts. The Capio group is also admired for its treatment of compulsive behaviours in children. After medical detox, each patient is given an individual care plan, which can involve cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), stress management techniques and coping mechanisms. Cost: starts at £4,000 for private treatment but NHS referrals also taken www.mentalhealth.capio.co.uk.

Who? Pete Doherty checked in for his addiction to heroin and crack cocaine.

### Clouds (now Action on Addiction)

The emphasis at Clouds, a country house near Salisbury, is on "gentle" addiction programmes developed over the past 20 years in its "naturally therapeutic environment" of beautiful parkland. Patients are given therapy from day one instead of waiting until they have undergone detox. Group therapy is key.

Costs: treatment lasts a maximum of six weeks; private patients pay £300 per day; NHS referrals also taken www.clouds.org.uk

Who? Robbie Williams attended Clouds for cocaine and alcohol problems. while "creative workshops" include art therapy, drumming workshops and dramatherapy. There is a strong emphasis on family members getting involved in the recovery process.

Costs: treatment lasts a maximum of six weeks; private patients pay £300 per day; NHS referrals also taken www.clouds.org.uk

Who? Robbie Williams attended Clouds for cocaine and alcohol problems. The Causeway

Billed as "Europe's most exclusive rehab", it is certainly London's most remote, located on private Osea Island in Essex. Most clients arrive by helicopter and stay in the 16th century village or the manor house, where recovery programmes are run by Brendan Quinn. The addiction regime is abstinence-based (without reference to the 12 step model) and there is much emphasis on physical exercise — sailing, field sports and long beach walks.

Alternative therapies (yoga, acupuncture, reflexology and music therapy) are incorporated, too. Daily private and group sessions target "relapse prevention". Quinn also offers a bespoke service after check-out and

Cost: The fees are £8,000 a week. Who? Chieffy high-flying City types who can afford such sums (very secretive about its client list).

will fly anywhere in the world within 24 hours of receiving an SOS call from a relapsed addict.

Cost: from £5,000 per week (private referrals only) www.1-1detox.co.uk

Who? Amy Winehouse, said to be addicted to heroin and cocaine, checked out after just 48 hours.

The Maudsley

Regarded as the country's centre of expertise for everything from eating disorders to schizophrenia and drug addiction. Clients are offered a wide range of interventions from reduction to complete detoxification from all problematic substances. Shares its Camberwell site with the Institute of Psychiatry, which carries out groundbreaking research — recent studies looked at how best to counsel the victims of the 7/7 bombings, and "anorexia — the female Asperger's".

Cost: takes only NHS patients, from south London and all over Britain www.slam.nhs.uk

Who? Paul Merton was admitted for six weeks after a nervous breakdown.

### The Priory

This flagship centre in Roehampton is the number one clinic of choice for recovering celebrities. As well as assisting with substance abuse, it has pioneered treatments for 21st-century addictions such as sex, shopping, gambling and the internet, and the extensive staff includes five consultants dedicated to eating disorders. A combination of treatments is applied, including neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR), psychodrama and use of trained "interventionists".

Cost: prices are said to run to £2,500 per week; NHS patients accepted, too. www.prioryhealthcare.com.

Who? Kate Moss sought help for cocaine problems; Paul Gascoigne was admitted suffering from alcoholism.

### Number 11

Extremely exclusive and discreet clinic located in a four-bedroom townhouse in South Kensington. Tailored for affluent executives suffering from burn-out — as well as alcohol and drug addiction — who do not have the time to undergo a three-month programme. Treatments include equine therapy, which has proved effective in identifying patients' deep-rooted insecurities.

Cost: The fees are £8,000 a week. Who? Chieffy high-flying City types who can afford such sums (very secretive about its client list).



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